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What Really Matters
Luke 12:13-21

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, ***tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.***” ¹⁴ But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a ***judge or arbitrator*** over you?” ¹⁵ And he said to them, “***Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.***” ¹⁶ Then he told them a ***parable***: “***The land of a rich man produced abundantly.***” ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ ¹⁸ Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; ***relax, eat, drink, be merry.***’ ²⁰ But God said to him, ‘***You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?***’ ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are ***not rich toward God.***”

This passage occurs in a part of Luke’s Gospel that is all about warnings. Warnings about the return of the Messiah. About how God alone will care for us, love us, ***and one day, HOLD US TO ACCOUNT.***

At first, this appears to be a story about FAIRNESS.

Someone comes to Jesus and asks for his fair share of his inheritance.

At that time, the eldest son would receive 2/3 and the younger 1/3 of the inheritance.

It seems like this is a younger brother has not been treated fairly.

Other leaders, like Moses, would have been a judge or arbitrator over such situations—so this person thinks that Jesus the Teacher will do the same.

Instead, Jesus says this is NOT MY PROBLEM.

And then he zeroes in on the REAL ISSUE.

Now, maybe he saw this man’s HEART, we don’t know.

We know that Jesus could see inside the human heart, to everyone’s motives, and maybe that’s what’s happening here—because he says immediately:

“Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”

Then he tells this parable about a rich FOOL.
A man who wants to ***build bigger barns for all of his stuff.***

And when we hear this story in kid's time, it seems pretty straightforward.
The interesting thing is that Jesus usually tells parables,
without sharing the main point, especially not before the story.
But here, that's exactly what he does.
He feels so strongly that he warns against GREED—then tells the parable.

And the MAN in the story?

He doesn't seem to be foolish or greedy when we think about it...
just Frugal. Smart. A planner.
He doesn't seem that different from anyone saving for a rainy day or retirement!

In fact, this man would have been considered BLESSED by God!

Because his land produced abundantly—and everyone would have assumed that
his riches meant God's favor.

That was the theology of God's people.

In fact, in Deuteronomy 30 it says that if you obey the Lord, the Lord will make
you prosperous in all your undertakings, all the fruits of your labor.

We have a theology like this today--***the Christian prosperity gospel.***

It that says money means blessing, and we can name it and claim it,
if we are faithful believers.

But the parable doesn't stop there.

Next, we hear this man's ***inner dialogue.***

*And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my
crops?' ¹⁸ Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and **build larger
ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.** ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul,
Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; **relax, eat, drink, be merry.**'*

Now, I wonder—what you hear in that dialogue?

One thing that stands out is the ***pronouns---he says I AND MY,***
over and over again.

Even though Jesus says that the LAND produced abundantly,

This man thinks ***it's all HIS.***

I, mine, my...he feels that it's all HIS.

In fact, there is absolutely no mention of ANYONE BUT HIM.

And no mention of GOD—the one who caused the land to produce abundantly in the first place!

This guy is MORE THAN just a planner, and a frugal guy.

His heart has crossed over, into greed.

Because he wants it all, for himself.

So God calls him a fool.....

‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

This rich man is a fool because ***he thinks he has all the time in the world*** to enjoy all of it himself.

He may even think he can take it with him!

Because he is only thinking about himself--- not God—not neighbor.

He doesn’t understand WHAT REALLY MATTERS IN LIFE.

I remember eating a hamburger with my Dad one day at diner in Tulsa,
and across the street was a funeral home.

And in the driveway of the funeral home was a hearse....

with a U-Haul trailer hooked to the back of it.

No joke.

And we just looked at each other and said, CAN YOU TAKE IT WITH YOU?

It was a funny illustration of something we’ve all heard—

“you can’t take it with you.”

But sometimes we act as if we can, right?

We store and save and put aside, thinking it will serve our souls well
for all of our days, and then some.

And is there anything WRONG with that?

Not with saving ...but there can be a lot wrong with our FOCUS.

And our HEARTS.

You know, I’ve never been to a FUNERAL of someone
who was praised for being frugal,
or having lots of cash left, or saving it all for themselves!

Instead, we remember with joy and celebration
those who are rich towards God.
And those who find WHAT REALLY MATTERS in life.

It's not enough to save for ourselves and our families.
 What about God?
How CAN we be RICH TOWARDS GOD?
 What about GIVING TO THE ONE who makes all things possible,
 and has given all things to us?

And what about our NEIGHBORS?
 Especially those who are in need?
 How are we loving them? Supporting them?
 How are we lifting them up—with our own resources?

This story begs the question—HOW ARE WE GREEDY?
 Most of us would say, we're not.
 But is that really true?
 I think if we're honest, *we are ALL greedy to some extent...*
 especially in this country.
 Because our whole society says *we need MORE, we deserve more...*
 More money, more stuff, more of everything.
 We are surrounded by messages about more...
 messages of excessive, insatiable desires...and those are messages of GREED.

***We tend to talk about what is FAIR, what we DESERVE,
 and what we've EARNED.***
 We don't talk about an excessive, insatiable desire or greed.
 We know that people like Gordon Gecko the Wall Street movie are wrong
 when they say, "*Greed is good*".
Greed is NOT good, we know this as followers of Jesus Christ.
 But do we know it in our HEARTS?

Luke was careful to point out the DANGERS of wealth, all through his gospel.
 It's in this Gospel that Jesus' first sermon is about good news for the poor,
 And Mary's sings about this as well.
 In Luke 8 we hear about riches choking the seeds of faith,
 And in Luke 16 we hear the story of Lazarus and the rich man.
 In this Gospel, we hear how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.
 And in this book a rich, young ruler walks away from following Jesus,

All because Jesus challenges his attachment to his wealth.

We often think in terms of FAIRNESS, not greed.

Which is exactly how this story begins-- a man asking for what is fair.

But all too often our concerns about what's fair or deserved,

lead us down a slippery slope..of Greed.

And slowly we start to lose track of WHAT REALLY MATTERS IN LIFE.

And some of this is based in FEAR.

We are afraid of not getting our fair share.

Sometimes we are afraid that if we are generous,

or we give more and more, then we'll have less and less....

When nothing could be further from the truth!

In the economy of the kingdom of God—there is always more than enough!

When we give, blessings multiply, not the other way around.

GENEROSITY, like love, is not a zero-sum game.

Unfortunately, we see the RESULTS OF GREED everywhere.

The rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer.

The gap between is bigger than ever before.

In the United States, in 2023, the top 10% of earners owned 69% of the total wealth, while the lowest 50% owned only 2.4% of the wealth.

Now think about that.

But maybe, YOU DON'T FEEL GREEDY.

So I wonder, how are you tempted by 'MORE? Or the 'GOTTA HAVE IT' bug?

Or the 'what if I don't have enough'?

I know I worry about this—

especially with a special needs daughter who depends on us.

What if there is not enough?

And I too wonder—what if I 'need' this or that...

when I already have enough in my home, or on my shelves.

So, how do we find the right BALANCE and perspective?

How do we *trust God for what we really NEED?* Not just what we want?

And most importantly, *how can we be RICH TOWARDS GOD?*

And find WHAT REALLY MATTERS?

I love what Pastor Eugene Peterson, the author of *The Message Bible*,
Had to say about accumulation.

“Christian living does not mean the achievement of every human potential, but the breaking open of our lives to the activity of God”.

We are supposed to be broken open, so that God can work through us.

Life is NOT about us BEING AND HAVING AND GETTING more.

Eugene Peterson, *Lights a Lovely Mile*, Pg. 240

And what about us as a CHURCH?

Are we as a church building bigger BARNs?

Or a bigger COMMUNITY?

Are we seeking more, or are we seeking ***WHAT REALLY MATTERS?***

This takes some thought, and planning, and working together to hear what God is calling us to do—in this day and time.

This means thinking about MISSION.

And how much we are spending on mission.

And is our GIVING driven by mission?

Or is our mission LIMITED by our giving?

We have a building used every day and night for different community missions.

Which is amazing, and different from so many other churches.

But we can DO MORE for the kingdom of God.

God has ***WORK FOR US TO DO in this community and beyond.***

It's up to us to listen and follow!

As I was getting ready one morning this week,

I was listening to news, and the suffering in our country,

And then the devastating news out of GAZA.

And thinking about all the CHILDREN there, who are literally starving.

And it hit me—I'm not different than a mom there,

no better, no more deserving of a child and a family that's healthy.

What would I do if my child was starving in a war-torn place like that?

Those children do not deserve what's happening to them.

And we cannot look away.

What will DO ABOUT IT, besides pray?

What will we do to ***carry on Jesus' mission***—to the poor, to those who are suffering, to those who are struggling? Here and around the world?

How can we make faithful financial choices,

While caring for the poor, and challenging the structures that hurt those in need?

Jesus came to bring hope and healing and new life.

And to do all of that--- ***THROUGH US.***

JESUS TAUGHT US TO LOVE GOD AND NEIGHBOR.

That's our calling.

We are to follow in his footsteps, and ***be HIS hands and feet on earth.***

He did NOT come for us to build bigger barns, but to share what we have.

He came that we might find ***WHAT REALLY MATTERS.***

We are a BLESSED COMMUNITY OF FAITH.

Each year, we welcome members, we baptize people,

We carry out several missions.

And soon we'll be welcoming all of our LPC friends as official members,

after a year and a half of worshipping together,

and over two years of sharing study and worship.

And we will all be receiving some of their financial LEGACY.

We must be GOOD STEWARDS of that legacy.

By making our building accessible to all people,

By helping everyone feel welcome.

And by reaching out into our community, in different ways, as the body of Christ.

We as a church are called to turn away from greed,

and seek WHAT REALLY MATTERS.

And what really matters is to be---RICH--TOWARDS GOD.

May God help us seek THOSE riches.

By ***giving, sharing, helping, and loving.***

And for that, all God's people can say together, Amen.